



Additional sighting record of melanistic Northern Palm Squirrel from Gujarat

In mammals, the pigmentation of their coat, skin, and eyes is determined by melanin, which exists in two distinct forms: Eumelanin, responsible for producing brown or black colour, and pheomelanin, which contributes to the manifestation of red or yellow tones (Ito & Wakamatsu 2003; Barrull & Mate 2012).

On 9 March 2024, at 1600 h near Paturan Village, Junagadh, Gujarat (21.5897N, 70.5833E), we spotted a dark, small animal with a tail from approximately 300 m away. The animal was photographed for documentation. After observing the unidentified species for a few minutes, we confirmed it to be a melanistic male Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* Wroughton, 1905; The Northern Palm Squirrel, also recognized as the Five-striped Palm Squirrel, is classified under family Sciuridae of order Rodentia.

This anomalous squirrel was observed foraging alongside



Melanistic and normal body coat of Northern Palm Squirrel.
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Melanistic body coat of Northern Palm Squirrel. © Ravi Patel.

two individuals with normal coat colour. The authors maintained a specific distance during observation and

continued monitoring for two hours. The melanistic squirrel displayed a body condition similar to that of other



members of the squirrel species, exhibiting no physical abnormalities, and its dark black coat appeared healthy and glossy. According to a review done on colour aberration in Indian mammals from 1886 to 2017 by Mahabal et al. (2019) a total of 56 mammalian species out of 421 in the Indian subcontinent exhibited various colour aberrations. Notably, within India, 61 animals of different species were reported to manifest melanistic morphologies.

Karan et al. (2020) reported two melanistic Five-striped Palm Squirrel from Vadodara District, Gujarat in 2009 and 2020. Here, we are reporting third instance of melanistic squirrel from the state of Gujarat.

References

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